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Refiguration of Childhoods in the Context of Digitalization: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Children's Spatial Constitutions of Well-Being

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Key words: childhood; cross-cultural comparison; digitalization; evaluative differentiations; figurational sociology; methodological nationalism; qualitative research; refiguration of spaces; self-concepts; sociology of space; spatial analysis; well-being

Abstract: Children's well-being has become the subject of attention in international comparative studies of childhood. The concept is central to understanding childhoods and generational orders within societies. Current challenges in conceptualizing children's well-being include addressing the normativity of well-being, how children themselves conceptualize well-being, and how this is embedded in social and cultural contexts. This is especially true with regard to the spatiality of well-being. How well-being is spatially constructed in children's narratives is rarely addressed by child well-being researchers. In this article, we assume that a better understanding of the spatiality of well-being will be helpful in disclosing the dynamics and characteristics of well-being. We offer findings from a multinational qualitative study to demonstrate the value of spatial analysis for understanding the social refiguration of childhoods beyond methodological nationalism. We draw upon examples from Baku (Azerbaijan), Geneva (Switzerland), Berlin (Germany), Sydney (Australia), and Tel Aviv (Israel). Our findings indicate that the exercise of agency, the democratization of childhoods, and the importance of having a translocal digital "own space" are significant norms central to and expressed in children's understandings of well-being. A structural feature of the current refiguration of childhoods is that it is always specific to local conditions.

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1. Spatial Construction as a Challenge for Child Well-Being Research

Child well-being researchers are concerned with delineating the elements of what constitutes a "good childhood" through the use of either objective indicators (such as child poverty rates, educational outcomes) or subjective indicators (such as life satisfaction in a range of domains, including self-assessed health, safety, etc.). In large because of the policy salience of this research, the field has been the subject of increasing attention in international comparative studies of childhood. The concept is seen as central to understanding childhoods and thus essential to developing an understanding of generational orders within societies and in understanding the everyday conditions of growing up that children face. However, conceptualizations of well-being are often applied uncritically, rather than interrogated. Current challenges include addressing the normativity and cultural contingency of well-being as well as the question of how children themselves conceptualize well-being and how this is embedded in social and cultural contexts. This is especially true in regard to the spatiality of well-being. How children themselves give meaning to spatial aspects when they talk about well-being and how well-being is spatially constructed in children's narratives or statements are rarely addressed by child well-being researchers. This shortcoming has major theoretical and empirical ramifications. [1]

In this article, we proceed from the premise that a better understanding of the spatiality of well-being from children's perspectives would be very helpful in disclosing the dynamics and characteristics of well-being—not as a natural entity, but as constructed cultural artifacts of childhoods and generational orders. In Section 2 of our article, we start by outlining the child well-being field to demonstrate not only that normativity and cultural contingency are challenges in child well-being research, but also that child well-being researchers produce and reproduce normative and culturally specific constructs of well-being. We illustrate this across several dimensions, particularly focusing on the spatial constitution of well-being as a cultural construct. In Section 3, we further explore the spatiality of child well-being research by providing an overview of how methodological nationalism characterizes multinational comparative research on child well-being, in which certain spatial constructs in well-being research are prioritized over others, and therefore, perhaps unwittingly, the authors reproduce assumptions about the value of certain kinds of childhoods over others. In the second half of Section 3, we change direction to offer several alternative analytical models. KNOBLAUCH and LÖW (2017) persuasively argued that the spatial organization of society is changing. We take up their analytical point and suggest one area of social life in which we can see this change: in the spatial organization of childhood as a specific social formation. We discuss challenges to methodological nationalism in childhood research, such as research in which the authors take transnational, translocal, and multiscalar approaches. In Section 4, we follow this by describing our study, "Children's Understandings of Well-Being" (CUWB), which is a multinational, qualitative research project in which we are attempting to reconstruct children's understandings and experiences of well-being in different parts of the world. In the study, we are exploring the relevance of cultural and social contexts for these meanings and experiences. Identifying

spatial phenomena within our data, we offer some findings from this study in Section 5 to demonstrate the value of spatial analysis for understanding the social refiguration of childhoods with a specific focus on norms and concepts of the self as cultural constructs. We draw upon the empirical examples of Baku (Azerbaijan), Geneva (Switzerland), Berlin (Germany), Sydney (Australia), and Tel Aviv (Israel) to demonstrate how concepts of autonomy, agency, privacy, and connection emerge as dimensions through which children's concepts of well-being in different parts of the world can be understood. We do not argue that these concepts are universal or uncontested. Rather, they are locally embedded, and their specific features can only be explained through their embeddedness in localized generational orders and political economic conditions, amongst other factors. We focus especially on the relevance of digital technologies as constitutive elements of children's spatial conceptualizations of well-being and how norms and concepts of a digital self are central to some children's understandings of well-being. Yet, because these are social norms and values that extend across places and that are actualized by children in their statements and narratives, which in turn are embedded in local social contexts, we see the possibility of identifying the interconnectedness of local, translocal, and perhaps even transnational aspects that refigure childhoods (Section 6). In our article, we demonstrate the value of spatial analyses that move beyond methodological nationalism and allow us to provide insights into the spatial refiguration of childhoods in global and local contexts. [2]

2. Normativity and Cultural Contingency as Challenges for Child Well-Being Research

2.1 Well-being as a cultural construct

Research on child well-being is an expanding international, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary field of research that has developed significantly over the last few decades. Researchers in this field have investigated the conditions under which children and young people grow up and the experiences they have in their daily lives, within their families, in their neighborhoods, and at school, often in an internationally comparative manner (DINISMAN, FERNANDES & MAIN, 2015; OECD, 2009; UNICEF, 2013). Well-being is considered central to childhoods and thus essential to developing an understanding of generational and other social orders within societies (ANDRESEN & BETZ, 2014; BEN-ARIEH, CASAS, FRØNES & KORBIN, 2014; BETZ, BOLLIG, JOOS & NEUMANN, 2018; ECARIUS, BERG, SERRY & OLIVERAS, 2017; FATTORE, FEGTER & HUNNER-KREISEL, 2019a; FATTORE, MASON & WATSON, 2016; MINKKINEN, 2013):

1. One major reason for the growing interest in child well-being is the *emergence of children's rights*, the sociology of childhood, and social constructionism as frameworks for conducting research on children. Within these frameworks, researchers position children as social actors, who provide knowledge on how childhood is socially constructed through their subjective experiences and narratives (ANDRESEN, 2013; HUNNER-KREISEL & BOHNE, 2016).
2. Another reason for the growing interest in child well-being is a shift in government policy in member countries of the "Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development" (OECD) (BETZ, 2013). Rather than focusing on "families," *childhood* has emerged *as an independent social category* and has increasingly become a central topic, for instance, in discussions related to education, child protection, and poverty (OECD, 2009; WORLD VISION, 2013).
3. A third reason for the growing interest in child well-being is the *paradox of affluence in modern societies* (PACIONE, 2003). Challenges posed by technological development, demographic changes, and environmental sustainability have sparked global debates about understandings of well-being and welfare that go beyond economic growth. By studying these challenges, we can also foreground intergenerational relationships and the balance of resources and responsibility between generations. [3]

Reflecting the influence of these developments, research on child well-being has changed over the last two decades (BEN-ARIEH et al., 2014; BRADSHAW, HOELSCHER & RICHARDSON, 2007) in ways that have raised important theoretical questions and challenges (FATTORE et al., 2019a). One question relates to the normativity and cultural contingency of well-being as a theoretical concept (ANDRESEN & BETZ, 2014; CAMFIELD, GUILLEN-ROYO & VELAZCO, 2013; ESSER, 2014; FEGTER & RICHTER, 2014; WEISNER, 2014). While in some instances definitions of well-being are explicit—for example, the capability approach, child rights approach, or developmental theories—well-being is often defined implicitly in quantitative research through the indicators used to measure child well-being or, in qualitative research, the sensitizing concepts evident in the fieldwork protocols or in the process of data analysis. [4]

These measures and sensitizing concepts are social constructs themselves, reflecting the norms and values of the scientific community, and represent the contexts in which these constructs are developed and applied. Notions of child well-being are, for example, situated within generational orders and serve as references to culturally contingent ideas of what constitutes a good childhood (ANDRESEN & RICHTER, 2012; BETZ et al., 2018; BÜHLER-NIEDERBERGER & SCHWITTEK, 2013). Researchers who follow these notions also run the risk of reproducing middle-class and Western biases in the theoretical frameworks they use (BÜHLER-NIEDERBERGER, 2011; ESSER, 2014; SAVAHL et al., 2015). This cultural contingency is sometimes acknowledged. For example, in the 2015 report on the "Programme for International Student Assessment" (PISA) on student well-being, the authors noted that variations in students' reports of life satisfaction or happiness across countries might be influenced by cultural or local

interpretations of what defines a happy life. However, it remains unusual for research to recognize that the concept of well-being is itself a normative construct, as to do so would concede the limited generalizability of any concept of well-being across time and space. [5]

Concerns have also been expressed about the cross-national application of well-being frameworks. VAN HOORN (2007) discussed the way culture and language may affect ratings of subjective well-being measures, which are frequently used as the key metric in quality-of-life studies. In their conceptualization of well-being, as determined by individual choice, positive psychologists ignore the social and cultural contexts in which individuals' lives and the decisions people make are situated (BECKER & MARECEK, 2008). CHRISTOPHER and HICKINBOTTOM (2008) criticized psychologists' attempts to construct a notion of happiness that transcends time and culture by demonstrating that the concept adheres to a Western-centric notion of the self that equates the good life to hedonistic notions of personal fulfillment. By emphasizing the connection between well-being and mastery, positive and developmental psychologists downplay the significance of other modes of interaction and self-identity, such as harmony or solidarity (JOSHANLOO, 2014). Related criticisms have been levelled at developmental notions of well-being, in which researchers universalize a particular notion of what a good childhood is without due regard to the relevance of these frameworks across time and space. [6]

Such critics foreground the relative significance of various contexts in which individuals understand and experience well-being, including the constructs used by researchers. Hence, they often use categories that are taken for granted, such as well-being or childhood, sometimes with a *lack of theoretical transparency as to the ways in which these categories are developed.* While child well-being indicators are highly explicit at the level of their operational attributes, it is often hard to discern why certain measures and domains have been selected as representing well-being, thus resulting in a lack of clarity at the level of their conceptual attributes. From a social constructionist perspective, there is also little regard as to the ways in which the operational measures and categories used reflect the influence of some scientific and non-scientific discourses and not others. [7]

In terms of methodology, this raises the question of how to address the historical, cultural, and individual contingencies of well-being, and shows that well-being is a culturally contingent, value-oriented construct embedded in society and culture and prone to change and redefinition over time (FATTORE, MASON & WATSON, 2007). WEISNER (2014), for example, defined well-being as the "engaged participation in the activities that are deemed desirable and valued in a cultural community and the psychological experiences that are produced by such engagement" (p.90). Definitions like this also implicitly reflect norms and concepts from specific scientific fields. Nevertheless, "what the valued goods and practices are and how they are reproduced on the level of individuals, practices, institutions, etc. remain an object of empirical analysis and lead to a reconstructive approach regarding concepts of well-being" (FEGTER & MOCK,

2019, p.18). This shift from predefined concepts of well-being toward investigations of well-being as a social and cultural construct can be clearly seen in qualitative studies where the researchers have asked children themselves about their understandings of well-being. Some recent articles have been published in the special issue "Children's Understandings of Well-Being in Global and Local Contexts—Qualitative Approaches" (FATTORE, FEGTER & HUNNER-KREISEL, 2019b) in the journal *Child Indicator Research* and in the special issue "Qualitative Research on Children's Well-Being Across National and Cultural Contexts" (FATTORE, FEGTER & HUNNER-KREISEL, 2019c) in the *International Journal of Emotional Education*. [8]

The "reconstructive approach regarding concepts of child well-being" (FEGTER & MOCK, 2019, p.18) is also evident in studies where researchers apply praxeological cultural approaches and reconstruct social or discursive practices as the *modus operandi* of cultures of well-being and specify the role of valued goods and practices in a specific historical context and situation (ibid.). One central argument in favor of these qualitative approaches is that researchers can use them for the systematic integration of reflections on the adult-child-relation as part of their research process and therefore examine how generational order is part of knowledge production on child well-being (FEGTER & RICHTER, 2014; MASON & WATSON, 2014). Although these qualitative approaches are garnering more attention, they are still relatively marginal within the mainly quantitative field of child well-being research. This is especially true of studies where researchers have investigated the spatial figuration of child well-being. Researchers of child well-being seldomly address how children themselves give meaning to spatial aspects when they talk about well-being and the characteristics of the spatial constitution of well-being in children's narratives or statements. [9]

2.2 The spatial constitution of well-being as a cultural construct

The *spatial constitution of childhoods* is one of the earliest empirical questions and themes in childhood research in Germany. Martha MUCHOW's empirical study "Der Lebensraum des Großstadtkindes" [The Life Space of the Metropolitan Child] in Hamburg-Barmbek, a working-class district in the city of Hamburg (Germany), was conducted in the 1920s and published posthumously in 1935 (MUCHOW & MUCHOW, 1975 [1935]). Working closely with STERN and inspired by VON UEXKÜLL's notion of the *Umwelt* [environment], MUCHOW distinguished analytically between "the space in which the child lives," the "space the child perceives," and the "space that the child lives out" (MUCHOW & MUCHOW, 1975 [1935], p.10)[1] to understand the city from the perspective of children as a space in which they deal actively with their socio-spatial environment. MUCHOW used qualitative methods—such as participant observation, mapping, and essay writing—and described the places, squares, and streets in Hamburg-Barmbek that were subjectively important to the children living there. She also documented the different roaming spaces of boys and girls

1 All translations from non-English texts are ours.

and described the activities and practices of children observed at specific locations. In developing and using this approach, MUCHOW was a pioneer of empirical research on the spatiality of childhoods and on spatial practices through which children gain agency and identity, which has inspired many recent studies on children in the city (ANDRESEN, FEGTER, IRANEE & BÜTOW, 2016; FEGTER, 2017; FISCHER, 2019; FRITSCHE, RAHN & REUTLINGER, 2011; WEHR, 2009; ZINNECKER, 1979). FAULSTICH-WIELAND and FAULSTICH (2012) published a highly commendable overview of MUCHOW's work and reception in child and youth research, and BEHNKEN and HONIG (2012) provided illuminating insights into the different phases of MUCHOW's reception with a new print of MUCHOWS's study, accompanied by additional chapters from childhood researchers on MUCHOWS's work. [10]

Another historical stream in German childhood studies is a type of analysis in which the researchers deconstruct the *constitution of modern childhood through the spatial separation of children from adults* (FEGTER, 2017; FEGTER & ANDRESEN, 2018). In her historical work on architectures of childhood, German sociologist BÜHLER-NIEDERBERGER (2003) outlined how the discovery of childhood (ARIÈS, 1962 [1960]) in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe was accompanied by a spatial separation between the adult sphere and the child sphere as well as how specific places and locations for children were established in this process and became more commonplace subsequently in the nineteenth and twentieth century—prominent examples include playgrounds, children's rooms, the educational institution of the kindergarten, etc. As a result of child-specific spaces being established, children were excluded from other places and locations, which were then considered inappropriate for children. For example, the street became a public space that was ill-suited for children and the inner-city was regarded as a place of moral decline inappropriate for children. The authors of educational childhood studies have reflected this with an increasing focus on how far these spatial figurations of childhoods have improved or worsened the conditions in which children grow up, from the perspective of education and protection, but also control and dependency (FEGTER & ANDRESEN, 2018). In contrast, there is a larger number of sociological childhood studies in which researchers have focused on the issue of how the spatial constitution of modern childhoods as characterized as a stage of life dominated by education and care is part of broader societal orders and shifts—for example, how the banishment of children from the street particularly affected the children of families living in poverty and contributed to the formation of unequal childhoods. Many of these children became the subjects of state welfare and protection interventions and an object of criminalizing discourses (BÜHLER-NIEDERBERGER, 2003). Another important example is how the process of domestication of childhood was part of what ELIAS (1994 [1939]) described as the civilizing process characterized by increasing social and self-control (ZINNECKER, 1990) and what FOUCAULT (1979 [1975]) documented as the shift toward orders of discipline and bio politics. These configurations of childhood within modernity were one dimension of the new formations of the modern family within society, characterized by a strong moral link between the well-being of the child, the family, and the nation state as

entangled concepts (FEGTER & ANDRESEN, 2018). These developments draw our attention to the following *empirical questions*:

- How do processes of spatial orders, differentiations, and boundary drawing—between children and adults but also amongst children and other goods and living beings—take place in current discourse on children and their well-being?
- How are these spatial constitutions/geographies of well-being involved in refiguring childhoods from the perspective of education, protection, and care?
- How are they involved in broader societal changes and their moral and normative orders?
- How are they part of reproducing and shifting social inequalities and hierarchies along generation, gender, class, race, or other orders?
- And how do children participate in these processes with their understandings and practices of spatial well-being? [11]

Despite this long tradition of research on places and spaces of childhoods, child well-being researchers have only recently started to look more closely at the *spatial dimension of well-being* (COULTON & SPILSBURY, 2014; FATTORE et al., 2019a; FEGTER & MOCK, 2019). Similar to the general field of child well-being research, most researchers use quantitative approaches in their studies and investigate the *statistical effects of places and spaces on children's objective or subjective well-being*—for example, the effects of quality of housing (OECD, 2009) or the level of subjective safety in a neighborhood on objective or subjective well-being dimensions. In their international comparative quantitative study ISCWeB, for example, DINISMAN et al. (2015) demonstrated how the satisfaction of children with their neighborhoods differed between countries. By contrasting countries or regions where children live, researchers often combine what McKENDRICK (2014) differentiated as studies in which they investigate geographies of well-being in places and of places. [12]

In qualitative studies on the other hand, researchers reconstruct the *meaning of places and spaces and how this meaning is (re)produced in practices and perceptions as part of the social and cultural construction of well-being*. AKKAN, MÜDERRISOGLU, UYAN-SEMERCI and ERDOGAN (2019) used participatory methods and an ethnographic approach to reconstruct how children in Istanbul perceived their neighborhood conditions and resources and how they attributed meaning to their experiences from the perspective of well-being. Other qualitative researchers have used interviews with children on their understandings of well-being to reconstruct whether and how children make spatial aspects relevant. MOORE and LYNCH (2017), for example, explored six- to eight-year-old children's conceptualizations of happiness and whether the physical environment was a relevant theme in their qualitative Irish ethnographic study. The analytical focus of this study was on what children said explicitly about the qualities of places and spaces in relation to their well-being. [13]

Only in a few studies have researchers analyzed children's narratives and conceptualizations as cultural practices through which notions of well-being, self,

and valued practices emerge performatively. One of these was a qualitative study carried out by ADAMS, SAVAHL, FLORENCE and JACKSON (2019) in a community with low socio-economic status in Cape Town, in which the authors aimed to explore how children conceptualized a child-friendly city. The researchers reconstructed how the image of a safe natural space to play was a discursive constitutive element of children's understandings and assessment of their neighborhood. FEGTER and MOCK (2019) presented a cultural analytical approach to the spatial constitution of well-being, with a focus on discursive practices in which children took part. Based on a case study with children from Berlin, they showed how the value and lack of value of the home country (the country from which the children or their families migrated) was based on a specific positing of the local self, from evaluative differentiations between "here" and "there" along categories of unrestricted mobility and sensation, and of technological progress and belonging. In doing so, they illustrated how the children's conceptualizations of their home country were part of translocal spaces of belonging and how they reproduced and shifted broader discourse on migration and cultural identity. They also indicated how digitalization became part of these contingent cultures of well-being. Although these studies have provided fruitful insights, they remain independent from each other. A qualitative-comparative approach, in which the authors undertake a cross-cultural comparison in a way that avoids reifying the nation state as an unquestioned unit of comparative analysis is still missing. [14]

3. Methodological Nationalism as a Challenge for Multinational Comparative Research on Child Well-being

3.1 Growing up under global and local conditions

Many researchers of child well-being presume that the *nation state is the container and main context explaining child well-being*. This is evident in studies of child well-being in which the authors rely on national institutions as an analytical and comparative category. International comparisons of child well-being play an important role in monitoring country-level performance in a range of areas related to child well-being. The OECD has a multi-dimensional monitoring report on child well-being, providing international comparisons across domains of children's lives using a combination of objective and subjective indicators. Similarly, the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) "Innocenti Report Cards" on child well-being in rich nations provide data on material well-being, health and safety, education, behaviors and risks, and housing and environment. [15]

In emphasizing these indicators, the researchers do not necessarily follow classic methodological nationalism, but rather *transport specific Western ideas of a "good life" as assumed frameworks for the research*. From a postcolonial and decolonial perspective, it is therefore critical to examine whether the authors reproduce Western or minority childhoods in their studies and with their chosen indicators (WIHSTUTZ, 2018). In using the term "minority childhood," they critically highlight that only a minority of children across the globe fits the normative ideals of a "good childhood" that is assumed to characterize childhoods

in the Western world. BÜHLER-NIEDERBERGER (2016) illustrated how specific understandings of childhood were unquestioningly assumed as the norm in the aid programs of international organizations, a practice that did not take into account the local context and was not sensitive to local social orders or the expectations of local social actors. Within these programs, a global image of the child as vulnerable and dependent is produced, which serves as a rationale for intervention. Patterns of hegemonic childhood (CORDERO ARCE, 2015) that support Eurocentric ideals of child well-being represent specific symbolic norms and discourses. According to MIGNOLO (2012) and QUIJANO (2008), Eurocentrism can be understood here as a non-reflexive image of good living/good childhood that ignores how these are also local living standards and ways of living that are deeply shaped by processes of colonialism, but at the same time proclaiming these as achievements to be followed by the rest of the world (HALL, 1992). Other types of childhood that do not correspond to the Eurocentric image of good childhood are positioned as inferior or ignored (LIEBEL, 2017). [16]

More commonly, methodological nationalism is implicit in child well-being research, evident in the *organization of the research*. We can observe this in how the research design strategies, data collection, and analytical methods are designed *around the nation state*. Like other areas of the social sciences, well-being research is generally limited by the nation state in terms of the research site, the researchers involved, the object of observation—for example, the relationship between well-being and a nation's education system—and the participants involved in the study. This is in part a practical issue in that most of these studies involve quantitative research, which requires a population-based sampling frame usually derived from national census data, thus reproducing a national bias through the sampling strategy. An example of how nation states provide an explanatory factor for child well-being can be found in BRADSHAW's (2014) analysis of social policies and child well-being, in which he demonstrated how nation-based policy path dependence accounted for major differences in social expenditures on children, child poverty rates, social protections for families with children, and how performance in these objective domains was related to subjective well-being. [17]

These kinds of analyses provide important insights, and we need to be cautious not to replace an unreflective methodological nationalism with a normative fetish for transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. A further practical issue for both qualitative and quantitative research pertains to ethical and legal issues for social science research. For example, Institutional Review Boards apply nationally determined legislative frameworks to guide research practice, even when such research occurs across contexts in which the ethical requirements for researchers vary considerably. [18]

Nation states matter, even in qualitative studies where the nation state might turn out to be a relevant category for data analysis. HEITE and MAGYAR-HAAS (2018), for example, focused on the role of pedagogical institutions in the context of the national welfare state as the relevant context for children's understandings

of well-being. HUNNER-KREISEL, HUSEYNOVA, JAFAROV, MÄRZ and NASRULLAYEVA (2021) provided an intersectional perspective by analyzing the locally contextualized situatedness of social practices and the structural dimensions (for example, the nation), which allowed for a cross-border analysis of empirical data focusing on concepts of child well-being. Examining the state of residential buildings in the urban contexts of Azerbaijan and Germany, they reconstructed the relevance of nation state politics. [19]

At the same time, *the social and cultural conditions in which children grow up transcend the boundaries of the nation state*. This is evident in the context of *digitalization* as a technological, social, and cultural phenomenon that shapes children's everyday lives and conditions of being in the world (DANBY, FLEER, DAVIDSON & HATZIGIANNI, 2018). National laws and political decisions have framed the manner that digitalization is changing our ways of living, working, and educating (STALDER, 2016). However, what have been referred to as virtual space (BEN-ARIEH, BOYER & GAJST, 2004), the virtual arena (NADAN & KAYE-TZADOK, 2019), and the digital age (LIVINGSTONE, 2016) are intrinsically transnational phenomena in which global and local dimensions are intertwined (LOBE, LIVINGSTONE & HADDON, 2007). In the field of child well-being research, there are still relatively few studies on digitalization (KALMUS, SIIBAK & BLINKA, 2014) and those that exist mostly have a quantitative focus. The authors showed that children worldwide are in contact with a wide range of digital tools (BYRNE, KARDEFELT-WINTHER, LIVINGSTONE & STOILOVA, 2016) and demonstrated how the use of the Internet and related online, digital, and networked technologies correlated with objective child well-being indicators, such as risks and opportunities associated with the use of digital technologies (LIVINGSTONE, 2016), health (FERRARA et al., 2017), a sense of belonging and self-esteem (COLLIN, RAHILLY, RICHARDSON & THIRD, 2011), and fear and depression (HOGE, BICKHAM & CANTOR, 2017). [20]

How children themselves evaluate their well-being in digital contexts, how they conceptualize digital well-being, and how both are linked to social and cultural contexts—for example, to values, norms, and self-concept as part of digital culture—is not well understood. In the few qualitative studies that exist on digitalization, the authors have demonstrated the limited value of the nation state as a unit of comparison. For example, in their study involving 148 children aged 6–18 from sixteen different countries, THIRD, BELLEROSE, DAWKINS, KELTIE, and PIHL (2014) reconstructed children's understandings of rights in a digital age and demonstrated that these understandings transcended the nation state. In another study on well-being as a cultural construct, the author used empirical data to argue that digitalization as a social phenomenon not only had an impact on children's well-being but also changed their concepts of well-being and demonstrated how children take part in these cultural practices (FEGTER, 2021). The findings from these studies can be interpreted as demonstrating how children are part of digital cultures and how this (re-)figures their understandings and experiences of well-being. [21]

The nation state as the central explanatory factor for understanding child well-being has also been questioned by researchers undertaking *migration research* on children and youth (HUNNER-KREISEL & BÜHLER-NIEDERBERGER, 2015). Researchers have not given much attention to young people's perspectives on migration. Instead, they have subsumed this topic under the umbrella of family. It has only been during the past decade that children and young people have been considered significant actors in migration processes and have been asked about their experiences (PUNCH, 2007; WHITEHEAD, HASHIM & IVERSEN, 2007). Part of this process was the "transnational turn" (VERTOVEC, 2009, p.6) in migration research, during which researchers directed attention to the multi-dimensional character of migration processes and looked beyond the countries of departure and arrival to analyze new spaces constituted by migration. While the theoretical gain of "transnational" spaces is subject to critical debate (BOMMES, 2003; PRIES, 2002), the basic assumptions of the transnational approach are that migration across national, cultural, and political boundaries creates hybrid forms of collective and individual identities, new notions of childhood and youth, and new ideas of family (BAILEY, 2009; BRETTELL, 2008 [2000]; FÜRSTENAU & NIEDRIG, 2007). As a result of the transnational turn, we turned our attention to migration processes beyond those that involve physical mobility. As a result, new groups of people moved for the first time into the focus of scientific inquiry: those who stay behind or are left behind, such as children in the context of global care chains (SALAZAR PARREÑAS, 2005), or those whose migration experiences are second-hand, inherited from siblings, other relatives, and peers (HUIJSMANS, 2006; HUNNER-KREISEL, 2013). [22]

3.2 Transnational, translocal, multi-scalar: Alternative approaches to methodological nationalism in childhood research

A variety of approaches have been developed as an alternative to methodological nationalism, including methodological transnationalism, network globalization, cosmopolitanism, post-colonialism, world polity, multi-scalar ethnography, global ethnography, and entangled historiography (AMELINA & FAIST, 2012; BECK & GRANDE, 2010; CASTELLS, 1996; CHAKRABARTY, 2000; LIEBEL, 2017; MEYER, 1999). In the field of childhood and migration studies, the critical subject of transnationalism has sparked fruitful debates (HUNNER-KREISEL & BOHNE, 2016; HUNNER-KREISEL & BÜHLER-NIEDERBERGER, 2015; TYRRELL, WHITE, NÍ LAOIRE & CARPENA-MÉNDEZ, 2013). PRIES (2002) saw the concept of *transnationalism* as a means of capturing the phenomenon that migration processes change how actors perceive their lives and circumstances, forcing them to develop new social practices in response, which constitute a transnational social space. This space is not territorial, not anchored geographically or in the nation state, but rather it is a transnational social space. [23]

BOMMES (2003, p.91) in particular criticized this approach for its spatial concept. He argued that transnational research remained glued to *nation state criteria* at the very moment when the transnational turn was transcending methodological nationalism in migration research (see also AMELINA, NERGIZ, FAIST & GLICK SCHILLER, 2012; WIMMER & GLICK SCHILLER, 2003). BOMMES (2003) did

not see any added theoretical value in transnational researchers who claimed they could ignore nation state contexts (see also DAHINDEN, 2009). What mattered instead was "to describe social structures [...] under conditions of globalization" (BOMMES, 2003, p.102). This also included the question of whether and how national welfare policies and their treatment of migrants affected the formation of transnational structures (ibid). Along these lines, contemporary transnational researchers debate the analytical validity of transborder social spaces and their underlying social practices: Are they a phenomenon that automatically arises from processes of migration, mobility, and globalization and that affects the lives of all those involved in these processes (ibid.)? What are the prerequisites under which life in transnational social spaces emerges, and to what extent do social inequalities shape the realization of actual transnational lives (DAHINDEN, 2012)? [24]

Another criticism of the concept of transnationalism concerns the *neglect of the local* (GREINER & SAKDAPOLRAK, 2013). Some scholars have called for a "more grounded transnationalism" (BRICKELL & DATTA, 2011, p.3) that takes into account how social practices and human belonging are anchored in context-specific social (knowledge) orders (ANTHIAS, 2008; OLIVIER, 2013; SCHMITZ, 2013). In the field of childhood studies, this has led to a useful application of the notion of translocality (GREINER & SAKDAPOLRAK, 2013; SMITH, 2011) to better understand how transnational space is inscribed locally for children (HUNNER-KREISEL & BÜHLER-NIEDERBERGER, 2015). In her ethnographic work, MAND (2015) focused on transnational family patterns that included regular visits of English-born children from Bangladeshi migrants to Bangladesh. In her study, the author reconstructed how the children's experiences during these visits involved emotional work in dealing with pluri-local identity constructions and ideas of transnational belonging that remained ambivalent. For MAND, ambivalence was the core element of a childhood that was transnational, which occurred within transnational social orders characterized by power asymmetries that required children to position themselves accordingly within the transnational field. MAND concluded that they positioned themselves according to a "Bangladeshi habitus" so as to fit in with local social orders. This is one example of how researchers can use a translocal analytical lens to focus on local social structures in which children negotiate their migration experiences within and across generations, emphasizing everyday spaces and face-to-face encounters that take place in these spaces (HANNERZ, 2008). [25]

These approaches have arisen in tandem with developments in understanding space, place, and scale, as constituted by multiple simultaneous processes (GLICK SCHILLER & CAGLAR, 2009, 2011). By focusing on the *ways in which actors or practices engage with local, regional, national, and transnational contexts*, researchers deal with a significant problem in methodological nationalism, which is based on a clear analytical differentiation between the global/local and national/international (AMELINA & FAIST, 2012). For example, how might an individual's self-concept be constructed through specific experiences or discourse within a city, and how are these experiences connected to regional or national dimensions? According to this approach, factors

influencing understandings of well-being and the concept of valued goods and activities are an assemblage of influences that interact at multiple levels. Rather than attempting to identify the linear direction of these factors, such as global effects on local conditions, we recognize that these factors involve simultaneous processes, mutually influencing each other. We see the relevance of taking into account the interdependency of different scales where, for example, children discuss both concrete and imagined aspects of what is important to their well-being, which transcends specific places. ZEITLYN (2016), in research on British-Bangladeshi children, studied the role of smell in creating a sense of belonging and identity for children as they traveled between London and Dhaka. For these children, as well as the researcher, a particular smell of a place could invoke memories and images of another physically distant place, creating a sense of belonging that traversed physical space and time. These experiences demonstrated the importance of the feelings and relationships associated with the place in the child's mind, stimulated through specific sensory experiences, which invoked felt and re-imagined experiences. [26]

A recent article on children's emotional geographies of well-being introduced a *relational concept of space*, adapting the approach taken by German sociologist LÖW (2016), who defined space as "a relational arrangement of living beings and social goods" (p.131). The bodies of human beings and animals, as well as buildings, roads, trees, etc., are understood in relation to each other in the intertwined processes of spacing—as the placing of social goods and people—and synthesis—as connecting goods and living beings through perception, ideation, or recall (LÖW, 2008). In a discourse analytical approach, FEGTER and MOCK (2019) investigated which elements are part of the discursive spacing of social goods and living beings when children talked about important places, people, and activities and how these elements were positioned in relation to each other and which perceptions, ideations, and recollections became relevant in their statements. As a result, they showed how belonging was constituted as a spatial construct beyond local and national territories and how these translocal spaces of belonging needed to be reflected as a local practice of the self that produced images and concepts of the self via a translocal space, but always in relation to a local positioning. In the next section, we discuss a study in which we attempted to apply these principles to researching child well-being in a comparative but locally contextualized context: the study on "Children's Understandings of Well-Being" (CUWB). [27]

4. Children's Understandings of Well-Being in Global and Local Contexts: The CUWB Study

The CUWB study is a multinational, qualitative study, in which we are reconstructing children's understandings and experiences of well-being in different parts of the world to explore the relevance of cultural and social contexts for these meanings and experiences. Our aim is to determine *similarities and differences in children's understandings of well-being in a locally oriented and cross-cultural manner and to take into account the normative and value-oriented aspect of well-being*. The study is designed around a core set of modules and principles that are replicated across the study sites. These include the participation of children aged eight to fourteen, an ethnographic component documenting the fieldwork setting, and the completion of several fieldwork stages. Currently, 26 countries are involved in this study, focusing on topics such as digital well-being, developing definitions of well-being, constructions of safety and vulnerability, media and technologies, negotiation processes, and inclusive methodology with vulnerable children. All research teams aim to follow the principles of allowing children to participate directly as research subjects in order to facilitate the children's participation rights and to document the challenges, processes, and mechanisms of conducting multinational qualitative research (FATTORE et al., 2019a). The study allows for a certain degree of openness in terms of exploring the analytical values of different social and epistemological approaches. The following analytical tools, therefore, do not necessarily represent the approaches of all members in the network. In the following analysis, we aim to focus on *children's spatial constitutions of well-being* (as part of the refiguration of generational and other social orders):

1. The starting point of our analysis is the assumption that *well-being is a cultural construct*, in the sense not only that well-being differs between people but also that the concepts and experiences of well-being are socially contingent.
2. *Children's perceptions and practices are part of reproducing and shifting concepts of well-being in an ongoing process*.
3. By focusing on spatial perceptions and practices, we apply a *relational concept of space* and define space as emerging through the process of relating living beings and non-living things at places under conditions of existing spatial orders (spatial practices as structuring and structured) and potentially linking scales (e.g., local, global, regional, national, transnational) (FEGTER & MOCK, 2019; KESSL, 2016; LÖW, 2008). As outlined earlier in this article, the field of childhood and migration research provides useful heuristics for the reconstruction of children's spatial understandings of well-being as social and cultural constructs constituted by an assemblage of factors across different socio-spatial levels.
4. Rather than re-inscribing the centrality of the nation state in research designs and processes of data collection, these approaches are open to other relevant factors, be they at a local or transnational level. A crucial topic in this context is the approach of cross-cultural comparison, which we apply in terms of an

understanding of cultures as symbolic orders and cross-cultural comparison as specific way of contrasting (HUMMRICH, 2013). Researchers in educational sciences on childhoods and youth have explicitly raised the challenge of diverse understandings of culture that underlie approaches of cross-cultural comparison (HUMMRICH & RADEMACHER, 2013). In line with this approach, we conceptualize *culture as a symbolic order* that emerges through practices of meaning-making embedded in social and historical contexts. Cross-cultural comparison is thus the comparison of practices of meaning-making—in which children take part—which we can reconstruct from the interview data and potentially contextualize with additional context-related data. From the perspective of grounded theory, *cross-cultural comparison is therefore a specific version of "contrasting" as a method for developing theory through a constant comparative analytical technique* grounded in data but at the same time heuristically informed by sensitizing theoretical knowledge (KELLE & KLUGE, 2010; STRAUSS & CORBIN, 1998 [1990]). The identification of relevant context factors is also a result of this analytical process of comparing data sets within and across countries. Cultures are not understood per se as national cultures, even if, for example, national semantics, practices, institutions, or politics might turn out to be a relevant context for the spatial constitution of well-being (as a cultural construct) in which children take part. [28]

The *analytical questions guiding our investigative approach to evaluating the interview material* with children from different parts of the world include:

1. What are the shared or different spatial topics within or across groups of children from different geographical areas?
2. How similar or different are the related spatial constructions that we can reconstruct from the interview data in terms of, for example, the following (heuristic) dimensions:

   * In terms of the meanings and concepts of what is good or valued that the spatial constructions (re)produce?

   * In terms of generational or other differentiations/orders as constitutive elements of these spatial constructions?

   * In terms of the spatial refiguration of childhoods from the perspectives of education, protection, and care?

   * In terms of the local, translocal, global as constitutive elements/parameters of spatial constructions?
3. How similar or different are the socio-cultural-economic contexts in which these spatial constructions are embedded (e.g., the child's socio-economic status, the child's living/housing conditions, the social practices or discourse in which the child or the practices of meaning-making are embedded, etc.)? [29]

5. Analysis: Digital Spaces and the Refiguration of Childhoods

5.1 The meaning of one's own room

In the CUWB study, the question about important places, people, and activities have led to very different constructions of the spatial aspect of well-being. A shared topic in many interviews has been "one's own room" or "my room"—which, at least at first glance, has an equivalent quantitative well-being indicator: "having one's own room." The *meaning of "one's own room" and the valued attributes that are linked to having one's own room differ within and across contexts*, as shown in the following reconstructions of the spatial construction. For one 12-year-old girl—referred to here as "B"—living in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, with her 10-year-old sister and parents in a small flat, "my room" was a relevant topic that linked space with questions of *autonomy and agency*. B's family home comprised three rooms constituted by two bedrooms and a living room, which included the entrance and the kitchen. B shared her bedroom with her sister. When asked what her biggest wish would be if she had a magic wand and could change anything, she told the interviewer:

> "I would change my room. [...] There is mom's stuff. I would like a big wardrobe that you can put everything in. A big one with lots of shelves. I would like to change it. The whole furniture of the room. [...] And our room doesn't get the sun. So, I would swap pink with purple, everything purple" (CUWB, Azerbaijan interview A-2, lines 53-56). [30]

We can see here that having a room of one's own was not necessarily about possessing a room of one's own. It might be about—as in this case—being able to implement one's own ideas about how the room is furnished, the color of the walls, whose things are stored in the room and where, thus determining the room's characteristics according to one's own aesthetic and functional preferences. The fact that B shared the room with her sister was not mentioned or made relevant. Whereas here the evaluation of one's own room referred to norms of self-determination and agency in arranging rooms and in response to living conditions, another example showed the value of being in *contact with peers*. For example, K, an 11-year-old girl from Geneva (STOECKLIN, 2018), also talked about her own room as an important place. After the divorce of her parents, K had to adjust to new living arrangements, including living with her stepmother, whom she did not especially like but tolerated. She constructed her bedroom as a resource to engage with peers by using information and communication technologies:

> "When I'm at home, I sing a lot. I'm often on my computer, too... I spend a lot of time using electronic devices [...] like the computer, the iPad, or the telephone. [...] I don't share too much with my family. I chat on WhatsApp with my friends. Sometimes I watch movies. I'm not all the day long on my telephone. There are of course moments where I do something else, like drawing or something like that. I like drawing, too, even if I don't draw very well" (p.14). [31]

Similar to B, this spatial construction of K's room in her statement involved a *construction of the self as an individual who had her own ideas and interests*. In both cases, we also see how this spatial construction of the self involved a *differentiation within generational and family orders*. Whereas K positioned herself in an ambivalent relation of connection and difference ("I don't share too much with my family"), in B's spatial construction, it was her "mom's stuff" in her room from which she distanced herself by wishing it would be somewhere else, somewhere inside, which implied, for example, a wish for it to be less visible ("There is mom's stuff. I would like a big wardrobe that you can put everything in"). [32]

At the same time, we can see some differences in *this spatial differentiation of the self within generational orders*. K, for example, did not share her room with a sibling, and her room was her own sphere within the family's house. B's own room was a shared room, and even the differentiation from her mother's things would have involved an internal differentiation within her room. Her wish was to put her mom's stuff into a cupboard in her room, not outside her room. Therefore, B's own room within generational and family orders was constructed within the physical space of a shared room, whereas K's spatial construction of her own room was a physically separate room for herself away from other family members. [33]

Based on these differences and also the explicit mention of housing conditions such as in B's statement ("And our room doesn't get the sun"), we can identify the *potential relevance of objective social conditions* as relevant contexts in which the spatial constructions of well-being were embedded: K lived in a comfortably middle-class household from one of the wealthiest parts of the world. The situation in Baku was somewhat different than Geneva. Although, B belonged to a middle-class household, Baku was confronted by major infrastructural challenges. These were strongly connected to political aims of establishing a market economy dominated by a parochial elite who had purely business interests and were supported by governmental authorities. As a result, housing affordability and the run-down quality of houses were major issues (VALIYEV, 2014). The eviction and displacement of homeowners and residents in the inner-city had been a major issue. Since 2010, 80,000 residents had been forcefully relocated as part of the "beautification" campaign aiming to establish a new image of Baku. Therefore, aspects of spatial well-being were major issues for the children in Baku city as many of them had to deal with restrictions on space in general and housing in particular (HUNNER-KREISEL et al., 2021). [34]

An analysis of more micro-scale material conditions might also be useful to determine the relationship between well-being and aspects of the built living environment. For example, natural lighting, air flow, and so on are factors that influence living conditions and are important qualitative aspects of housing in many cultural contexts. While we did not obtain the data needed to perform this kind of analysis in this study, the significance of architecture, building density, floor plan, and apartment layout might also be important factors for spatial well-being. [35]

5.2 Connectedness and the digital self

Beyond these social context-related factors, it is worth reconstructing in more detail from the interview data the *micro-processes behind the reproduction and transformation of childhoods through spatial separations* in which these children took part through their constructions of well-being. K's room, for example, was constructed as part of a *translocal space of communication with peers via digital technologies,* whereas B's room was the construction of a *local space at her actual home*. Similarly, we can observe how spatial separation and self-making within generational orders in B's statement involved a local generational separation within her family's apartment, whereas in K's statements, the spatial separation via her own room was a translocal generational separation made possible through the use and availability of digital devices, whose ownership was also linked to socio-economic factors. This multi-scalar aspect could also be thought of as an example of KNOBLAUCH and LÖW's (2017) concept of polycontextualization in that it was also an example of "different orders or frames occur[ing] simultaneously at one location" and specifically an example of "the simultaneous relevance of different spatial scales, dimensions and levels" (p.12): [36]

In our analysis of G's discussion of the importance of her computer for her well-being, we provide another example of how digitalization is changing the spatial orders of childhoods, *shifting the traditional logic of childhood places as belonging to the inner sanctum of the family and other protected spheres—like playgrounds and educational institutions*. G was a 9-year-old girl who lived in the outer suburbs of Sydney. As part of the mapping exercise, G drew a guinea pig. When asked about it, the conversation quickly turned to the guinea pig as a source of conflict between G and her parents:

> "I: And, are you the only one in the family with a pet?
>
> G: My parents used to take care of it for me, and they keep reminding me, 'G, this isn't our pet, it's your pet.' And, I keep saying 'Sorry,' because I'm usually on the computer all the time. And my parents hate that. They think I'm just typing, typing to my friends and going on Skype and saying hi to my friends.
>
> I: Yeah, so you are always on your computer. What do you like about it? All the games?
>
> G: I like Skype most of all because as soon as I turn on my computer, I hear my Skype phone ringing and I always answer it or I'm calling my friends.
>
> I: So do you talk to your friends on Skype?
>
> G: Just one friend I have, my friend L. But my friend L has another friend, her name is M. I met her at my friend L's party, and now she's on my Skype. She's one of my Skype contacts as well now" (CUWB, Australian interview S-16, lines 22-30). [37]

Similar to K, the use of digital technologies served to create a translocal space. This space, however, was embedded in existing physical spatial relationships (with her friend L, who lived nearby) and was also an issue over which autonomy

relationships between parents and children were negotiated. The issue of digital technologies emerged again later in the interview when G discussed visiting her grandmother in Peru:

> "I: What differences do you think there are between Peru and Australia?
>
> G: Well, I think that there—it's kind of more, like here where we are a developed country. And in Peru and stuff, they're a developing country. So, I'm not—so I think it's somewhere around that area, because their Wi-Fi signal and stuff isn't so—as good as us. That's really the most important thing to me. Because I love the computer and electronics all the time, so.
>
> I: Oh, so when you go to Peru ...?
>
> G: Yeah. I walk everywhere. I go in the car, to go, like, 'Mum, where's the Wi-Fi?' And, then she's like, 'Oh, there's none.' There's some. There's only back at my nan's house Wi-Fi, so when we're out here, so no more out here. Because, here there's Wi-Fi, where, like, rural areas and when you're in the car you can easily just be connected to Wi-Fi. Where there, it doesn't exist. So, yeah. ... Yeah. In Peru there's hardly any computers. Like, my grandma has one, but it's kind of old, really old and broken type of thing. And, my—yeah, she's the only one who I know who's got a computer, but otherwise, yeah. I was really missing my computer when we were in Peru. Still, I had a great time in the end" (lines 225-239). [38]

G immediately associated the question about differences between Australia and Peru with the social difference of being a developed or undeveloped country and the *status of being a developed nation with the extensiveness of the digital Wi-Fi (WLAN) network* that she highlighted as "most important" to her. While G's assessment cannot serve as a basis to determine whether Peru has an inferior Internet network to Australia, G's statement demonstrated how digital technologies have become part of norms related to the value of spatial well-being: A good place or a good country was where you have readily available access to Wi-Fi wherever you go. This *value and norm of access to Wi-Fi as ubiquitous* was also the reference point for the evaluative differentiation between a developed and undeveloped country. G differentiated between the developed—as technologically advanced, networked, connected, and composed by new technology and availability—and the underdeveloped—as technologically inferior, digitally unconnected, isolated, and redundant technology. [39]

In addition to the norms of digital access and connectedness, the differentiation between Peru and Australia also involved a *construction of the self as a digital self* that closely identified with being permanently connected to Wi-Fi and digital technologies ("That is really the most important thing to me" or "I was really missing my computer when we were in Peru"). And it involved a construction of a national collective self and identity as being superior along the dimension of Wi-Fi accessibility ("We are a developed country"). We could see something very similar in an interview with F, a girl form Berlin, who differentiated between Germany and Somalia along the lines of Wi-Fi access and referred to Somalia as backward in these terms: "You actually have to get used to it, not to be in front of

the TV every day, not to have Wi-Fi. You could also say that Somalia is like the mediaeval times" (FEGTER & MOCK, 2019, pp.22-23). [40]

Both girls positioned themselves as belonging to the developed, technologically superior nation through these spatial evaluative differentiations between "here" and "there," which were differentiated along norms of digital accessibility. Being able to comply with these digital norms of a good place and experience a childhood that is digitally configured is in part determined by differences in digital infrastructure and the digital divide between nations, similar to how B's experiences of having one's own room were related to the political economy of development in Baku. The construction of Peru and Somalia as underdeveloped and backward in contrast to *Sydney and Berlin allowed us to reproduce categories based on which we can place and differentiate these physical, cultural, and social places along contrasting historical, development, and progress lines*. Drawing upon the work of FEGTER and MOCK, we can also see how this differentiation constituted the use of media and technology not only as valuable but also as an expression of being modern, contemporary, and dynamic and the self as a modern subject. The digital norm of spatial well-being that we have reconstructed here therefore potentially plays a part in reproducing unequal childhoods, as the fulfilment of the norm depends on social, economic, political conditions that are distributed unequally. [41]

5.3 Normative orders of good places for children

The *normative orders of good places for children* represent another level at which the norms and concepts of a digital self can potentially refigure childhoods. In G's discussion of having Internet access in the car, we can discern tropes of being digitally connected and mobile as penetrating figurations of well-being. What was valued in this discussion was constructed through an idea of a digitally connected agent or citizen. Where the social circumstances did not allow her to enact these modes of being digitally connected, the situation was discussed in terms of a deficit. This concept of the self as engaged in processes of digitalization stood in an ambivalent relationship with other constructs of what a good childhood was: for example, romanticized versions of childhood engaged with nature, in creative (non-digital) play, or in fantasy. While there was nothing in G's discussion that precluded that this was not also the case, the foregrounding of digital connection emerged as a priority:

> "I: So, when you're at home and you've got your computer, you go on Skype with your friends?
>
> G: Yeah. Usually ... I asked my dad to download Skype for me and set up an account and everything. And he did... and that is good, so I can go on Skype ... So I needed it because my friend, L, is going to Bosnia permanently ... So yeah, she's going next year to Bosnia, so I wanted my dad to download Skype. And he was really serious about it, he was, like, 'No. No. Don't, um, open any junk mail, or don't listen to those little ads.' 'Okay, dad, okay.' And he was very—he kept on entering my room to see if I was doing anything, and my mum and dad don't like the idea that I shut myself in my

> room. I just, like, lock it and then I just sit down on the computer and typing and playing and saying hi. I just like it so much" (CUWB, Australian interview S-16, lines 109-119). [42]

In this case, the digital space was not only a translocal space but a *transnational space*, connecting Sydney to Bosnia. The space was constructed as an intergenerationally ordered space, in which the father was positioned as the forbidding, rule-setting, and monitoring actor—representing a concept of childhood in which the digital arena is a potentially dangerous or inappropriate space for children. The child's self was the calming, relaxed actor who handled the parent's concerns in an assured way while following independent norms—like being mobile and digitally connected and having the capacity to be fluid in digital space. Being mobile in physical space (the car) was presented as a strong action-guiding norm, despite the concerns her father voiced regarding the use of the technology. [43]

Translocal digital children's spheres were also a topic in the interview data with children from Tel Aviv. In research undertaken by NADAN and KAYE-TZADOK (2019), children discussed how digital technologies posed dangers of isolation and exploitation, which further underscored the need for adults to monitor and supervise their children's use of online digital technologies. For example, one of the participants stated:

> "I think there are advantages to being able to call if you can't find your way or if you get lost. I can call my mom and she'll direct me if I'm alone, for example, or sometimes I don't take the shopping list because I remember it by heart and then suddenly on the way I forget something. I can call my mom or send her a message on WhatsApp (9-year-old secular Jewish girl, low socio-economic status)" (p.469). [44]

Here, the use of *digital technologies* was constructed as *creating experiences of safety for children* because it allowed them to be in *immediate contact with their parents*. According to the researchers,

> "the interviews brought forward the children's feelings that their cellular phones give them a sense of protection when they are in risky situations or when they are alone in places they see as dangerous, as they can be in continuous contact with their parents" (ibid.). [45]

Many of their interviews showed how children constructed a good digital translocal space for themselves as a space monitored by adults, which reproduced a specific norm of generational orders as orders of protection and care, present in children's conceptualizations of (digital) good places and spaces. In contrast, in the Berlin section of the CUWB fieldwork undertaken in an after-school recreational center in the district of Kreuzberg, some of the children constructed the digital space as a space where *parents did not play any role*. Different from the children in NADAN and KAYE-TZADOK's (2019) study, the Kreuzberg children did not regard the digital arena as a place characterized by

danger. What was also notable in the discussions was that parents or other adults did not emerge as a topic in the narratives at all. The focus of the construction was that using digital and electronic devices at home was one of the main activities that they undertook after school when they were at home alone, and they constructed this place at that time of the day as quite boring and where nothing happened. In doing so, they implicitly reproduced the norm that a good space offers activities, stimulation, and variety. Unlike K, B, and G, the children in this study did not talk about their own rooms, but instead talked about "being on their own" at home. The construction was that the home in the afternoon was often a boring place, where they were alone, and using applications like WhatsApp or playing with friends via the Internet opened opportunities for being less bored and feeling less alone at home. [46]

6. Investigating the Spatial Refiguration of Childhoods in Global and Local Contexts Through Research on Children's Spatial Conceptualizations of Well-Being

By focusing on the ways in which conceptualizations of well-being are simultaneously constituted by local, regional, national, transnational, and global processes, we can discern how understandings and experiences of well-being are an assemblage of influences that interact at multiple spatial levels (FATTORE et al., 2019a). This means that *understandings and experiences of well-being are always bound to context*, as opposed to having abstract or universal qualities. [47]

In our analysis, we indicated the *importance of places for what was valued with respect to an understanding of well-being*. However, we suggest that any investigation of children's spatial understandings of well-being necessitates a concrete and particular reconstruction and description. *The values and meanings of well-being places are constituted through the social and cultural context in which children are embedded*—certain people, relationships, physical and historical features, but also norms and what is valued as good and what is (a good) self that enriches understandings of well-being. As KITAYAMA, MARKUS, and KUROKAWA (2000) suggested: "It is not just that different things make people happy in different cultural contexts – this is obviously the case. More significantly it is the ways of 'being well' and the experience of well-being that are different" (p.115; see also FEGTER & MOCK, 2019). [48]

An emphasis on place also offers a further advantage in that it causes us to direct our attention to the intersectional inequalities that characterize certain places compared to others. We see this concretely in children's evaluative differentiations between places, such as the attributed qualities of permanent access to and use of digital technologies at these places, or in the value of having their own room, which has a significant correlation to spatial inequalities in material wealth and resources between local areas (ADAMS et al., 2019; AKKAN et al.,2019; COULTON & SPILSBURY, 2014; McKENDRICK, 2014). [49]

In our findings, we saw that the *exercise of agency* was a topic that featured as part of children's understandings of spatial well-being across various social and

cultural spaces. In our examples taken from Baku, Berlin, Geneva, Sydney, and Tel Aviv, how spatial agency is constructed in children's narratives, the spheres of life children make relevant for exercising agency, and the kinds of topics children say they should be able to decide were constituted by cultural norms and concepts of the self and embedded in social, political, and economic orders. Moreover, the manner in which agency is conceptualized with regard to local spaces provides an opportunity to think about the relation between these spatial conceptualizations of well-being and intergenerational relations in specific places and the degree to which we can generalize about intergenerational relations as a context for cultural concepts of spatial well-being. [50]

To some extent, based on our findings, we can argue that *democratization of childhoods* can be discerned through the power of rights as a universalizing discourse, whose norms we can identify as elements in children's conceptualizations of well-being. However, the manner in which children discuss negotiating agency is highly context specific. All our examples demonstrated different conceptualizations of processes through which children negotiated aspects of their lives as well as different self-concepts in terms of the degree of agency and responsibility toward adults or parents, sometimes constructed at odds with adults' expectations of children. However, the boundary for the legitimate exercise of agency, what aspects of life can be negotiated, and the content of negotiation varied in nearly every case. [51]

In our analysis, we also illustrated the *relevance of a translocal "own space" with friends constructed through the use of digital technologies*. We suggest that this translocal space crosses the border between the physical inside and outside of children's places, between the private and the public as traditional understandings of good places for children, and thus challenges the privatization of childhood within a construct of the nuclear family. In our methodological perspective on norms and concepts of self that constitute children's conceptualizations of spatial well-being, we saw children's statements and narratives as part of reproducing and shifting concepts of privacy, the public, and the position of the child within these orders. The elision between agency and changes to the private sphere for children made possible through digitalization marked a potential refiguration of childhoods. One of the self-concepts in the children's statements was a self that wanted to exercise control over how it shared or disclosed information about itself to others, which SHMUELI and BLECHER-PRIGAT (2011) described as interaction management, choosing when and how to interact with others, and information management, choosing what to disclose to others. This was supported by WOLFE (1975) in her seminal research on children and privacy as she concluded that, given the fact that children's interactions with others were typically managed by those in authority in the home and at school, children sought privacy in order to process information. For children in our research, the idea of asserting privacy was often linked to the use of digital technologies in one's own space, be it physical or virtual. [52]

We identified negotiated agency, the significance given to communication with peers, be it in person or via digital technologies and social media, and the

extension of personal privacy to include friends and purposefully exclude adults as key normative dimensions of the refiguration of childhood in relation to well-being. Western discourses of childhood emphasize innocence, vulnerability, and dependence, providing a powerful justification for monitoring children in their private spaces, which is evident in popular concerns regarding children's use of digital and social media. The risks posed by such media are deemed to be located principally in the public sphere, conceptualized as images or behaviors invading upon the privacy of children and their families. Consequently, in order to protect children, it is considered necessary to regulate not only children's participation in public life but also the intermediate zone of the public within the private—what children watch, with whom, and for what purpose—thus justifying an increasing surveillance of children's private spaces. [53]

Analyzing the meaning of the digital as a translocal and transnational space, which is evident in the interviews included here, demonstrates how and which valued social and cultural goods and practices are produced through evaluative differentiations. In the interviews with K and G, it was the value of unrestricted mobility (in public), and in the case of the children's statements from the Berlin study, it was the value of variety and discovery that was (re)produced through the spatial construction of being a connected subject able to communicate with others in digital space. Digital technologies are conceptualized as providing opportunities to have intimate relationships in a "public" way within the confines of the home. Children are linked through the use of digital technologies such that they are simultaneously located in an "interactively shared virtual space" (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017, p.13) within a local physical space, such as their bedroom. However, the privacy created by having some control over a physical space makes the interactively shared virtual space possible. In these practices, we therefore see an interactive linking of mediated communications with physical spaces. This understanding of the use of digital and social media transgresses the boundary between the public and the private and limits—in social practice—adult control of children's behavior. This implies a subtle unsettling of protected and privatized childhoods. Public debates about the effects of digital media on children, including children being exposed to online dangers, can also be interpreted as indicative of this shift in childhood orders. [54]

We can see here a relevance to KNOBLAUCH and LÖWS's communicative constructionism approach. In enacting the value of the digital self, children are undertaking bodily performances that "make perceivable, observable, accountable what makes sense to others" (p.4), in a way that positions them as a digitalized subject. Therefore, we would also agree that the digital subject can only be conceived as part of a spatial assemblage consisting of both material relations (the physical location, technology) and symbolic relations (abstract modes of communication) of interdependence (p.5), through which a child can assert itself as a digital self. [55]

With the democratizing of family life, *notions of privacy* have also been extended to children in some places in a somewhat modified form, with children having their own private spaces not only as a precondition for allowing sexual relations

between adults, but also as a condition for what is considered appropriate childhood development, especially into adolescence. In the examples provided here from diverse places, constructing one's own room represented an act of putting distance between the self and parents and creating a space separated from parents. This is a construct of the self linked to (in)dependence, which is a feature of generational relations. Differentiations along generational orders are an important constitutive element for constructing the value of having one's own room. In our analysis, we can also see how nation state politics can be an important context for translocal concepts of well-being. In our analysis of B and K's construction of the value of having their own room, the salience of adult-centric infrastructure policy as a social context for these conceptualizations of spatial well-being was evident, limiting the agency of children and their families with regard to housing and the children's ability to shape a room or space of their own (along with other dimensions through which social inequalities are reproduced). [56]

The possibility for connection across national spaces through the use of digital technologies demonstrates how a sense of well-being can be connected to a sense of self-concept that is translocal, formed through interactions that transgress physical space and national boundaries (p.14). Moreover, with the expansion of digital infrastructures across the world and thus the increasing access to and relevance of digital technologies for children in diverse spatial settings, we could argue that diverse childhoods may be becoming mediatized (p.13). This raises the question of how this mediatization affects different figurations of childhood. Are we seeing a convergence in the way childhood is experienced around the increasingly common use of digital technologies—for example, as being important to practices of self in childhood—or is the use of digital technologies also localized as part of local childhood practices? [57]

The territorial state (p.7) therefore maintains some explanatory power for differentiating between "here" and "there": for example, in children's discussions of digitally rich and poor nations. Moreover, the territorial state remains a relevant factor for understanding differences that might exist in terms of the quality of digital infrastructure. However, on both counts—children invoking nation state differences and differences in digital infrastructure as determined by national political economies—notions of territoriality beyond the nation state are implicit, with forms of colonization and the dynamics of global political economies being important for understanding uneven patterns of development between nations—as evidenced in the importance of multinational capital and networked production chains across national spaces for organizing national economies (p.9). [58]

Future researchers could analyze the consequences of this constitution of available space for other dimensions of children's understandings of well-being: for example, how the value and specific meaning of having a place of one's own (in a sense of being able to be on your own/alone) is connected to the possibility of "internal work" for well-being (FATTORE et al., 2016). The translocal materiality of the digital is also evident as a relevant contextual factor in that the possibility of achieving the norm of being a connected digital actor is dependent

on the rules and regulations that different nation states have implemented to govern telecommunications and the degree to which nations have the resources to roll out telecommunication infrastructure. Therefore, the fluidity of digital space is highly dependent upon political-economic conditions. [59]

We have demonstrated how conceptualizations of digitalization change the logic of the spatial separation between children and adults via, for example, children's own rooms from a local to a translocal level. The digital "own spheres" are constructed as translocal spaces. This change in the spatial constitution of childhoods through digitalization implies a potential refiguration of childhoods from the perspectives of education, protection, care, and control. This is, for example, because the translocal "own space" with friends via digital devices and technologies from children's own rooms crosses the border between the inside and outside of the physical room, between what is traditionally considered the private and the public, and thus also the traditional positioning of the children within the inner private sphere of the family, at least according to the modern logic of Western childhoods. [60]

While we have only provided some examples in this paper from participating research teams, we believe the next step in our research would be to extend our analysis of children's spatial conceptualizations of well-being to include children from other locations, especially from the *Global South*. Following the analytic approach of a constant comparative analysis used in this article, we intend to explore the following topics:

1. whether the reconstructed topics and the norms and concepts of the self (as part of children's spatial constructions of well-being) are similar or different across the extended data set;
2. to what extent digitalization is a constitutive element in children's conceptualizations of their own spaces and how meanings of digitalization potentially reproduce or shift the spatial orders of childhoods from local to translocal spaces;
3. the similarities and differences in the social, political, economic, and technological contexts that children make relevant for their understandings of spatial well-being or that we as researchers define as relevant context-related factors. [61]

While there is often a strong public debate on digitalization and childhoods in the form of a moral panic discourse, we see it firstly as an empirical question to reconstruct the following questions:

- How are childhoods changing through digitalization as analyzed in this paper?
- How are children themselves part of the spatial refiguration of childhoods through digitalization?
- How do they talk about these processes?
- Do children construct their spaces as digital spaces, and if so, how?

- How do children position themselves within these spaces?
- Which norms, values, and concepts of the self do children reproduce through these spatial constructions? [62]

This further underscores the value of a spatial analysis for understanding social and cultural refigurations of childhoods in global and local contexts. [63]

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